

The Standard-Examiner Sunday Feature Section

What Ought a Woman Do When Menaced with Blackmail?



Helpful Example Set by Mrs. Fahnestock's
Brave Resistance of the Villainous
Valet Who Threatened to Besmirch
Her Good Name and Unsuccess-
fully Tried to Force Hush Money
From Her at the
Muzzle of
a Gun

"As Mrs. Fahnestock whirled around to face the threatening figure whose reflection in the mirror had filled her with such alarm, she recognized—her husband's valet. 'Well, are you going to pay or not?' he snarled."

MRS. GIBSON FAHNESTOCK, Jr., seated at the dressing table in her boudoir, heard the door open abruptly behind her and an unexpected footfall, half muffled by a soft rug.

She stiffened. In the well-ordered Chateau de Montaigne, one of the show places of Nice, none of the household was accustomed to such unceremonious procedure. Even a personal maid must needs knock and request permission before entering the boudoir of Madame. Nothing had heralded this intruder's approach, as sudden as it was stealthy.

Madame waited for an explanation. None came. Instead, there was an ominous click as the door was closed. The footfalls sounded again as the unknown presence drew nearer.

The offended feeling of the distinguished-looking matron at the dressing table was succeeded by one of alarm. She clutched her filmy negligee about her, but the paralysis of fear was upon her and she felt powerless to turn her head.

Across the length of the dainty boudoir, past the foot of the canopied French bed, sounded the footsteps. Relentlessly the presence came nearer and nearer. One more step and the mirror on Madame's dressing table would reveal all.

A smothered scream escaped Mrs. Fahnestock's lips, for the reflection in her mirror showed her the menacing muzzle of a revolver.

At last she regained power over her muscles and whirled around, shrinking back against the table. And then she recognized the threatening figure—her husband's valet.

The dark, saturnine features of the man were gathered in a scowl. "Well, are you going to pay or not?" he snarled. The woman, white to the lips, gasped, but could not speak. The valet lowered his weapon.

"I could kill you easily," he said, "but that would not suit my purpose. I have a far better method than robbery. 'We are here alone in your boudoir. It was simple. How many other times I might have slipped in here to see you! How often might we have met in the evenings

in the gardens? As your husband's valet I have had unlimited opportunities for secret intimacies with you."

"How dare you say such things!" the matron cried. She rose as if to run to the door and summon aid.

The man drew aside. "Call any one and every one you like. You and I will be found alone in your boudoir. And then what will people think?" he sneered.

Mrs. Fahnestock shrank back, aghast. The strength of the valet's vile intimations was irrefutable. What would be the attitude of the world, ever ready to put the worst construction upon matters? Would her mere word stand, even against the accusations of a rogue? Would there not always be those to doubt, in spite of her utmost sincerity and her most vehement protestations? It was indeed a desperate situation. Blackmail always is.

When his victim had subsided into shocked silence the blackmailer elaborated his scheme. He would declare to Mr. Fahnestock, her husband, that he, the valet Cuira, and Mrs. Fahnestock had been involved in a guilty love affair unless a payment of 500,000 francs was forthcoming at once. Failure to pay, he assured her, meant a ruined reputation and a ruined home.

People will say that where there is smoke there is fire, Cuira hinted, with that diabolical knowledge of the perversities of human nature which is the stock in trade of the blackmailer.

Small wonder that poor Mrs. Fahnestock temporized and asked for time to obtain the money asked. Flourishing his revolver, the man left the room.

Mrs. Fahnestock, living abroad with her husband in the luxury of their chateau at Nice, had become the target of a crime which thousands of her fellow-Americans cannot escape, though supposedly safe and secure among their friends at home.

The valet, Ralph Cuira, had been engaged by the Fahnestocks on high recommendations. A few weeks later they noticed that his hair was changing color. He was led to explain that he had concealed his identity and that he in reality was the Marquis de Castao, Spanish grandee and member of Maltese nobility.

Lady Elsie Mackay, the English beauty who is said to have tipped a would-be blackmailer into the river

He then was promoted to secretarial work and began to pay attentions to Mrs. Fahnestock and later to threaten her with blackmail, menacing her with a revolver and threatening to shoot her and her husband, burn the chateau and commit suicide.

Profoundly startled, Mrs. Fahnestock dared say nothing for a time. Then she took steps toward the only way to save herself. She confided in two persons, who advised her to take the story at once to her husband. Trusting to his faith in her, she did so.

Still seeking to avoid notoriety, the Fahnestocks fled to Paris, but were followed there by Cuira, who continued to make threats.

Then Mrs. Fahnestock resolved upon that courageous act which is the only way to beat blackmail—to drive it out in the open.

Calling in the Paris police, they laid

a plot for the blackmailer. And into it he fell.

Haled into court, Cuira admitted his stories of his relations with Mrs. Fahnestock were lies. He had blackmailed, he pleaded tearfully, to get money to pay numerous debts. His claims to nobility were as false as his words, the police declared.

The story of the entire affair thus became public. Far from reflecting on Mrs. Fahnestock, her brave action in unmasking the blackmailer has become a source of great credit to her.

"It is not true that I ever offered to pay anything after he started trying to blackmail me," Mrs. Fahnestock explained in telling of the affair. "The only offer to help Cuira, who is only twenty, was when he claimed to be a marquis. Evidently of good family, I wanted to help him while he was



Mrs. Harris Fahnestock is the fashionable American society woman who had the courage to send a blackmailing servant to prison

continuing his education. "We have been the victim of a dastardly scoundrel who gained our confidence by presenting recommendations. Time and again I was tempted to pay him what he asked in order to keep my name clear of sensational publicity, but I decided to fight to the end, knowing that the court would obtain a confession from the rogue."

Such was the course of brave Mrs. Fahnestock. Other victims of blackmailers, however, have not known so well the best manner of dealing with them.

Walter S. Ward, the bakery magnate, was driven to such desperation that he shot and killed a man he said was blackmailing him. According to the millionaire's story, before he acted to end the torment to which he was being subjected, he already had paid out \$30,000 to close the lips of those who said they stood ready to reveal scandalous stories about him unless paid. Meeting on a lonely road the men he said were goading him beyond endurance, Ward drew his revolver and shot one of them to death.

In the course of the investigations during the resulting trial stories were told

Mrs. Walter S. Ward, whose husband claims to have shot one of the gang that was trying to blackmail him

which must have caused suffering to Ward's beautiful young wife. It was charged that the millionaire had maintained an apartment in New York City, where other women had been seen in his company. These reports Ward's pistol had not been able to still.

A much wiser and more able method of dealing with a blackmailer was that practiced by the remarkable Lady Elsie Mackay, the daughter of Lord Inchcape, millionaire Briton.

The girl, whose elopement with the dashing Captain Denis Wyndham had ended in a disastrous marriage, had become an actress in the movies in a brave attempt to win her own way. She had been abandoned by her husband and her angry father alike.

In that condition she was approached one day by a man of some social standing, who declared he had private information to her advantage. He induced her to go out on the Thames River in a boat with him, that none might overhear. There he threatened the startled girl with a pernicious blackmail plot.

Lady Elsie did not hesitate. Her strong, young body lunged to one side and the boat lurched suddenly with her. With a gasp of surprise the would-be blackmailer went over the side of the boat and into the river.

Lady Elsie bent to the oars and rowed to the nearest police station. When she returned with constables the man was nowhere to be found—nor has he been heard of since.

The girl, like Mrs. Fahnestock, had such courage as men of national prominence lack, men who pay up to a blackmail trust every year.

To unmask the threatener of blackmail, to fight the devil with fire, is the only sure defense.